

B. NEPA/Section 404 Merger Process

A National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) / 404 Merger Team was established for the project to improve environmental protection and the regulatory process. The merger team consists of representatives from the following state and federal agencies:

US Army Corps of Engineers
US Fish and Wildlife Service
US Environmental Protection Agency
Tennessee Valley Authority
NCDENR-Division of Water Quality/Wetlands
NC Wildlife Resources Commission
NC Department of Cultural Resources

Merger team meetings have been held prior to publishing this State Environmental Assessment (SEA) to discuss and agree on the project purpose and need, alternatives under consideration, to review the impacts associated with the alternatives under consideration, and agree upon project alternatives to carry forward for detailed study.

Concurrence Point 1 (Purpose and Need):	Concurrence on 08/20/2003
Concurrence Point 2 (Alternatives):	Concurrence on 12/13/2005
Concurrence Point 2A (Bridging Decisions and Alternatives to Carry Forward)	Concurrence on 09/03/2008

Additional merger meetings to concur on the Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative (LEDPA) and Avoidance and Minimization of impacts will be held for this project subsequent to this SEA.

C. Public Involvement

The NCDOT held a Citizens Informational Workshop on December 2, 1999 at Swain County Administration Building to inform residents of the project and provide project information. Citizen and activist group comments have been received, with an even split of comments in favor and against the project. Typical concerns raised regard concerns over impacts to the Little Tennessee River, impacts to other natural features in the area, and increased speeds on a paved surface. Typical comments in favor of the projects cite a lack of connectivity between Franklin and the Bryson City area, sediment and dust in the project area, and the usability of the road during flood conditions.

A public hearing will be held following the circulation of this document. This public hearing will provide more detailed information to the public about the proposed improvements. The public will be invited to make additional comments or voice concerns regarding the proposed project.

IX. BASIS FOR STATE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

On the basis of planning and environmental studies, it is anticipated that this project will not have a significant detrimental effect on the quality of the human or natural environment. The proposed project will cause no significant changes in route classification or land use and is not